OBITUARIES

Key CIA Figure Cord Meyer Dies; Headed 'Dirty Tricks Department'

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Cord Meyer Jr., 80, a figure central to many of the Central Intelligence Agency's covert operations during the Cold War, including the secret funding of student, labor and literary groups, died March 13 at the Washington Home. He suffered from a variety of ailments, including lymphoma.

Mr. Meyer, who was with CIA from 1951 to 1977, joined as a prominent young liberal who was active in the world government movement. He advanced to become the top deputy in a section of the agency called the "dirty tricks department" by detractors because of its elaborate activities aimed at curbing communist influence.

Mr. Meyer gained notoriety in 1967 when it was revealed in the radical magazine Ramparts that, under his direction, the CIA had been subsidizing groups such as the National Student Association and the literary journal Encounter.

In a 1978 interview, Mr. Meyer said of the controversy, which was investigated by a presidential panel, that "the object was not to subvert students, of course, but to make it possible for the American point of view to be represented." At the time, Soviet operatives were having success recruiting student organizers around the world.

Mr. Meyer again made headlines in 1972, when it was revealed that he had asked an old friend from the world government movement, who was then in the publishing business, to allow the CIA to review the galley proofs of a book critical of the agency's dealings with the drug traffic in Southeast Asia.

The instances offered rare glimpses into the internal mechanics of a shadowy agency that was coming under increasing scrutiny by critics of its tactics. In both cases, Mr. Meyer said he had not run afoul of the law and had the nation's security interests at heart. In a statement yesterday, CIA Director George J. Tenet called Mr. Meyer "a passionate defender of freedom around the world."

Mr. Meyer and his twin brother Quentin were born in Washington, where his father, a diplomat and Long Island real estate developer, was in between overseas postings. The family later settled in New York City, where Mr. Meyer enjoyed a youth of privilege. He attended St. Paul's preparatory school in New Hampshire and Yale University. He graduated a semester early in 1942, with bachelor's degrees in English and philosophy, so that he could enter the Marine Corps.

He fought in the Pacific and was badly wounded by a Japanese grenade during a landing on Guam in 1944. He lost an eye as a result of the wound and spent the next several months in military hospitals. His decorations included the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. He later learned that his twin had been killed in the fighting on Okinawa.

In war dispatches that were published in the Atlantic Monthly and in a 1946 autobiography titled "Waves of Darkness," Mr. Meyer articulated an ideology colored by his war experiences. In an excerpt from the autobiography, he wrote: "The only certain fruit of this insanity will be the rotting bodies upon which the sun will impartially shine tomorrow. Let us throw down these guns that we hate."

The book won him the O. Henry Prize in 1946 for the best first-published story.

After the war, he served as an aide to Harold Stassen, the United States delegate at the drafting in San Francisco of the United Nations Charter. Mr. Meyer then became active in the world government movement, where his intellect and good looks made him a popular spokesman for the post-World War II generation. He helped found the United World Federalists, which sought to avoid nuclear war by a loose federation among nations.

Mr. Meyer also took an active part in formation of the American Veterans Committee, a liberal group dedicated to the idea that veterans should get no special treatment.

Mr. Meyer, who was considered a rising star in liberal circles, stunned some of his fellow activists when he joined the CIA in 1951 after being recruited by Allen Dulles, who later became CIA director.

Shortly after he joined the agency, Mr. Meyer was accused by the FBI of having communist sympathies. He was exonerated in an internal hearing.

He had married the former Mary Pinchot shortly after the war. Their 9-year-old son, Michael, was killed in an automobile accident in 1959.

Shortly afterward, the couple divorced. Mary Meyer was murdered along the C&O Canal towpath in 1964.

In the days after her death, her sister, Tony Pinchot, and Pinchot's then-husband, Benjamin C. Bradlee, observed CIA counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton, a colleague of Cord Meyer, attempting to break into Mary Meyer's house and recover a diary. Mr. Bradlee would later became executive editor of The Washington Post.

The diary, discovered later that day by Mr. Bradlee and Ms. Pinchot, revealed a romantic connection between President John F. Kennedy and Mary Meyer.

Mr. Meyer's official title from 1967 to 1973 was assistant deputy director of plans, a post in which he worked with legendary spymaster Thomas H. Karamessines, also known as "The Greek." Among Mr. Meyer's duties was the CIA's management of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

It was assumed that Mr. Meyer would eventually advance to Mr. Karamessines's position, but the public disclosure about the book deal and the subsidization of the National Student Association apparently dampened his prospects. Over the years, colleagues had described him as intelligent, but also hard to get along with. He retired from the agency in 1977 after a posting as the London station chief.

He was honored by the CIA as a "trailblazer" in 1997, when the agency celebrated its 50th anniversary. He was awarded three Distinguished Intelligence Medals during his career.

After retiring, Mr. Meyer published several books, including a memoir titled "Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA." He also wrote a column that ran in such papers as the Washington Times and reflected his staunchly anti-communist positions.

He was a member of the Metropolitan Club, the Yale Club of Washington and the Council on Foreign Relations.

Mr. Meyer is survived by his wife of 35 years, the former Starke Patteson; two sons from his first marriage, Mark, of Ashland, Va., and Quentin, of Washington; a stepson, Nicholas Anderson of Great Falls; a stepdaughter, Alexis Anderson of Washington; a brother; and a grandson.